

OCS Graduation Speech

August 19, 2016 10:30am

Captain Savageaux, Mike, thanks for that kind introduction and the invitation to speak here today. Ladies and

Gentlemen, it is truly a privilege to be here this morning in beautiful Newport. It is even better to be away from

Washington... on such an important day for you... for these young officers, each of them future leaders of our Navy.

For the parents and families in the audience, I know you are proud, and I know your sons, daughters, husbands, wives, and significant others will attempt to explain the enormous impact the last four months have had on their lives. Listen to them, their enthusiasm, their pride, and know that while they have changed, the full transformation has only just begun. What you will hear are the ideals of Service before self, honor, courage, and commitment.

What you see now is an awakening within these men and women, the empowerment of belonging to something larger than oneself, and the pride of knowing that it is an organization designed to make the world a better place.

For this group of Ensigns assembled here, today marks the beginning of the rest of your naval careers. You will, no matter what happens from this day forward, be a member of a very elite organization, with a rich tradition that goes back even beyond the beginning of our great nation. You are more than a citizen now... Today, you wear the cloth of the nation as a commissioned officer, and because of that, you bear more responsibility. You will be respected for the uniform you wear; you will be credited for the work ethic, the intellect, the warrior spirit and the resourcefulness of those who have gone before you. And even after you leave

the Navy, folks will have a certain expectation of what you bring to the table.

I can honestly say I look back on my very short, but intense indoctrination here in Newport quite fondly. I know you may not be able to do that yet – but you will someday. I remember the leadership of our Senior classmen, who seemed so worldly and knowledgeable on the Navy at the time, even though they were only a few weeks ahead of us. I remember the gouge, and practical knowledge taught to us by our prior enlisted classmates who had the entire game figured out before day one. And I remember my roommate, who, quite literally, always “sweated the load”, especially when it came to piloting, where one error would end your day. He had such a challenge with the August Newport humidity, and the fact that the classrooms in Perry Hall

were not air conditioned back in those days, that he designed a “piloting T-shirt”. It was a shirt he cut off at the waist and in the sleeves, so he would be cooler. Well, on the day of the final piloting exam, as luck would have it, it was about 100 degrees, no breeze, light cloud cover, and about 150% humidity. I looked across the room, and my roommate was sweating tens of gallons, much of which was ending up on his paper piloting chart. Yes, we still used paper charts then. But luck was with him – he caught his mistake in plotting a running fix, victory was close..... Until he decided to erase the fix. With the chart soaked from his perspiration, he erased a hole into the chart about the size of a quarter – about 150 yds wide, given the scale of the chart.... Remedial piloting it was for the rest of his liberty days left at Newport....

I can also remember sitting out in this audience almost 32 years ago, and then Secretary of the Navy John Lehman was our guest speaker. While unfortunately I don't remember most of what he said ... because all I could think about was crossing that Bridge and putting Newport in my rear view mirror... what I do recall him saying is what our role as officers in the 600 ship Navy would be and how we must be ready to meet and confront the Soviet Union in their home waters...

But reflecting back, it was clear he knew we were on the edge of a new era for the Navy, the Military and our Nation. I stand before you today with a very similar message. You will be the leaders of a unique and different Navy.

You read in the papers it is all about budget cuts. And true, after every period of major conflict, the US has downsized its military, but we are less familiar with the fact that each of those periods produced new strategies, new technologies, and new ideas.

Those that cling to the old ways will go the way of Battleships in WWII. What you can be assured of is that the Navy will adapt, and in the long run we will become more capable. It will be a Navy capable of meeting our adversaries head to head on the high seas, and equally capable of addressing if not exploiting the asymmetric threat on our own terms. But the thing that won't change is the ingenuity and resourcefulness of its leaders – You. People are and will forever remain our asymmetric advantage. It will be incumbent on you to work new and creative

solutions, with challenges you could never have conceived, perhaps in conditions you would not wish upon your worst enemy. That is what has made the U.S. Navy what it has always been – its resourceful Sailors – who always managed to pull victory from defeat. I am envious – envious of the challenges and envious of the opportunities that lie ahead for you. But make no mistake, there is no shortage of hard work to be done – the challenges will be handed to you – you will have to have done the homework, learned your trade, and be positioned to seize the opportunities that come your way.

I can't leave without offering some free advice, as you are newly minted naval officers, but it comes with the disclaimer that one should be wary of getting what you paid for.

After spending this much time in the Navy, and having commanded an attack submarine, a submarine squadron and a forward deployed submarine group, I have some opinions on what will make you successful as officers, and as leaders. So here's my Reader's Digest version:

- 1. Technical and Tactical competence will be the foundation of your career. When you get to your ships or squadrons or units, learn your craft, and learn it well. Everything else flows from your understanding of your trade.**
- 2. Treat your subordinates the way you want to be treated. Respect is a two way street, and your team will repay you a thousand times over if you treat them with dignity and respect. You are not there to be friends with your crew, but you are all literally in the same boat. And**

don't misinterpret this as me implying you should let things go – holding people accountable, consistently, and in a manner that makes them better, is what earns their respect. You owe it to the 99% who always do their jobs to the best of their ability to hold the other 1% accountable. And at times, it is perfectly appropriate to do it visibly.

3. Don't confuse Laptop Leadership and Deckplate Leadership. Know your people, your equipment, AND your programs. You have to be out and about watching and talking to learn, and know what is really going on.

4. It takes months or even years to earn the trust of your CO – it only takes one failure to lose the trust of one of your crew for good. The CO will be tolerant of

mistakes as you grow as an officer, a tactician, and a leader. The crew will be less so, because your action or inaction will impact their lives. Be true to them, and true to yourself, even if it's not the answer they want.

- 5. They call this the Service for a reason – it's not easy to lead by example. It requires sacrifices for the good of the ship, the good of the squadron, the good of the crew. Like it or not, as an officer, you are being watched and judged. Use that opportunity to lead by example.**
- 6. Embrace your mistakes, admit to them, use them to make your entire team better, and make it part of your team's culture to do the same.**

With all this tasking I laid out for you, you can't forget to make time to do it right at home, taking care of your family, and to stop and smell the roses along the way.

And so, in closing, congratulations on your commissioning, you have chosen your profession wisely, you have already made friends who will be with you for life, and you have a very bright future.

Godspeed, fair winds, and following seas.

Thank you.